

## **RRB Customer Service Plan Update**

The U.S. Railroad Retirement Board's Customer Service Plan promotes the principles and objectives of customer-driven quality service agency-wide. The Board's plan states specifically the level of service that customers can expect and an important part of the plan is a pledge to keep beneficiaries informed of how well the Board is meeting the plan's standards. The plan is reviewed and updated periodically, as the Board gains more experience with it and compares its service with the best in business.

The following questions and answers provide information about the Railroad Retirement Board's performance in the key areas of railroad retirement, disability and survivor benefit payments, plus railroad unemployment and sickness benefit payments, and the handling of correspondence during fiscal year 1997 (October 1996 - September 1997).

### **1. What standards were used by the Board in fiscal year 1997 for processing applications for retirement benefits under the Railroad Retirement Act?**

The Board's Customer Service Plan provided that persons who filed in advance of their actual retirement date for an employee annuity based on age and service, or a spouse annuity, would receive their first payment, or a decision, within 45 days of their date of retirement.

During fiscal year 1997, 71 percent of employee and 74.5 percent of spouse applications processed were issued a payment or a decision within 30 days of the annuity beginning date (including both those filing in advance of their retirement and those filing after retirement). Average processing times for employee and spouse applications were 31.4 and 23.3 days, respectively.

For processing disability annuities, the Board's Customer Service Plan provided that persons who filed for a railroad retirement disability annuity would receive their first payment, or a decision, within 120 days from the date they filed their application.

**(More)**

During fiscal year 1997, 49.6 percent of disability applications processed were issued a payment, or a decision, within 120 days. Average processing time for disability applications was 130.7 days.

**2. How did the Board's performance in the area of survivor benefits measure up to its standards during the 1997 fiscal year?**

The Board's Customer Service Plan provided that those filing for monthly survivor benefit payments or a lump-sum benefit payment would receive their first payment, or a decision, within 75 days from the date they filed their application, or became entitled to benefits, if later.

During fiscal year 1997, 91.4 percent of the applications processed for recurring monthly benefits were issued a payment or a decision within 75 days; 87.8 percent of lump-sum applications processed were issued a payment or a decision within 75 days. Average processing times for recurring and lump-sum applications were 33 and 30 days, respectively.

**3. What standards were established by the Board for the handling of applications and claims for railroad unemployment and sickness benefits and how well did the Board meet these standards?**

Under the Board's Customer Service Plan, persons who filed an application for unemployment or sickness insurance benefits will receive a claim form, or a decision, within 15 days of the date the Board receives their application. Likewise, persons filing subsequent biweekly claims for unemployment or sickness insurance benefits will receive a payment, or a decision, within 15 days of the date the Board receives their claim forms.

During fiscal year 1997, 97 percent of the unemployment benefit applications the Board processed were completed within 10 days of receipt; 99.2 percent of sickness applications were also processed within 10 days of receipt. Average processing times for unemployment and sickness insurance applications were 2.1 and 3.3 days respectively.

In addition, 99.3 percent of subsequent claims for unemployment and sickness benefits were processed within 10 days of receipt. Payments are issued within two business days of processing. The average processing time for claims was 4.9 days.

**4. How has the Board met the standards it set in the area of replying to correspondence?**

The Board's standard has been to reply within 10 working days of receiving a letter. If for any reason it cannot, the letter will be acknowledged and the writer told how long it will be before the Board can answer his or her questions fully.

In fiscal year 1997, 99.3 percent of all correspondence the Board received was responded to, either with an acknowledgement or with a final reply, within 10 working days.

**5. Did the Board have a standard in fiscal year 1997 for measuring its accessibility to those trying to reach it by phone?**

Yes. The Board's standard was that those telephoning it should be able to reach it on the first try. A study conducted in September 1997 showed that 90 percent of those calling the Board reached it on the first try.

**6. How did the Board's performance in meeting its standards in fiscal year 1997 compare to its performance in fiscal year 1996?**

The results for fiscal year 1997 showed an improvement over fiscal year 1996 in all but 2 areas. The percentage of unemployment and sickness claims processed within 10 days of receipt remained at the 1996 level of 99.3 percent; and there was a slight decrease in the percentage of unemployment benefit applications processed within 10 days of receipt.

**7. Did the Board institute any new customer service initiatives during 1997?**

The Board has implemented a number of enhancements to its toll-free RRB Help Line. Railroad retirement annuitants and railroad workers calling the automated RRB Help Line at 1-800-808-0772 now have access to several new services.

Retirees are now able to request a letter showing their current monthly benefit rate. Railroad Medicare beneficiaries can request a replacement Medicare card, and active and former railroad employees can now use the RRB Help Line to request a statement of their creditable railroad service and compensation. Callers to the toll-free number can also find the address and telephone number for the Board field office serving their area.

Established in 1996, the RRB Help Line operates 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. In the past fiscal year, the Help Line received over 311,000 calls from railroad unemployment and sickness insurance claimants requesting information about their claims and benefit payments. This feature is still available.

Information on customer service standards, benefit requirements, field office locations, and other topics can also be accessed through the Board's Internet Web site at [www.rrb.gov](http://www.rrb.gov).

**8. Can beneficiaries provide feedback to the Board about the service they receive?**

A Customer Assessment Survey form is available in every office, allowing beneficiaries to evaluate the service they received and suggest how the Board can improve its service. Persons not satisfied with the service they received may contact the manager of the office with which they have been dealing, or the Regional Director who is responsible for that office. Their names and addresses are available in each office. In addition, comments may be sent by e-mail to [comments@rrb.gov](mailto:comments@rrb.gov).